

# DUTCH NEIGHBORS IN THE AMERICAS

Published by  
THE NETHERLANDS INFORMATION SERVICE  
10 ROCKEFELLER PLAZA, NEW YORK 20, N. Y.

DISTRIBUTED BY MIDWESTERN DIVISION  
NETHERLANDS INFORMATION SERVICE  
(A GOVERNMENT AGENCY OF THE NETHERLANDS)

MIDWEST DIVISION

## I. SURINAM

NETHERLANDS MUSEUM  
HOLLAND, MICH.

The only Netherlands territory on the South-American continent is Surinam, a country of 55,000 square miles north of Brazil. Because Surinam is located between British Guiana and French Guiana, it is also known as Dutch Guiana.

At one time in history Surinam was part of a large territory held by the Dutch West Indies Company which also included a large section of Brazil. Surinam's total population on January 1, 1949 amounted to some 212,000 persons (less than four per square mile). The great majority lives in the coastal area.

Some three hundred years ago, Surinam was believed to be the most promising colony in the world. In 1667, after the Dutch-English war, the Dutch accepted it gladly in exchange for the new settlement on the Hudson River in New Netherlands. In the eyes of the Dutch, Manhattan island, with the same climate as that of Holland, held little prospects, while Surinam was called "the richest and most promising colony owing to the vast treasures it pours into the scales of commerce".

These treasures came mainly from some forty primitive sugar plantations established by English settlers. When in 1667 the Dutch conquered the English fort at Paramaribo, they captured a shipload full of sugar worth half a million guilders. Because of this unexpected windfall they believed Surinam to be

a country "beyond comparison the richest in the world". But when the Dutch acquired Surinam, while ceding Manhattan to the English, the English colonists destroyed all the sugar plantations and left Surinam, taking with them their slaves, their cattle and their sugar stocks stored up at Paramaribo. When they left, Surinam was a barren region, without supplies and without cultivated land.

Many Ups and Downs. Twenty years later, Surinam knew a second period of prosperity under the Dutch Governor Van Sommelsdijk, who restored order and discipline. The number of sugar plantations grew to more than 200. This governor also made Paramaribo into a pleasant city by constructing drainage systems and other public works. For more than a hun-



THE LIBRARY  
THE UNIVERSITY  
OF TEXAS  
HUMANITIES READING ROOM

Indian Women and  
Children of Surinam

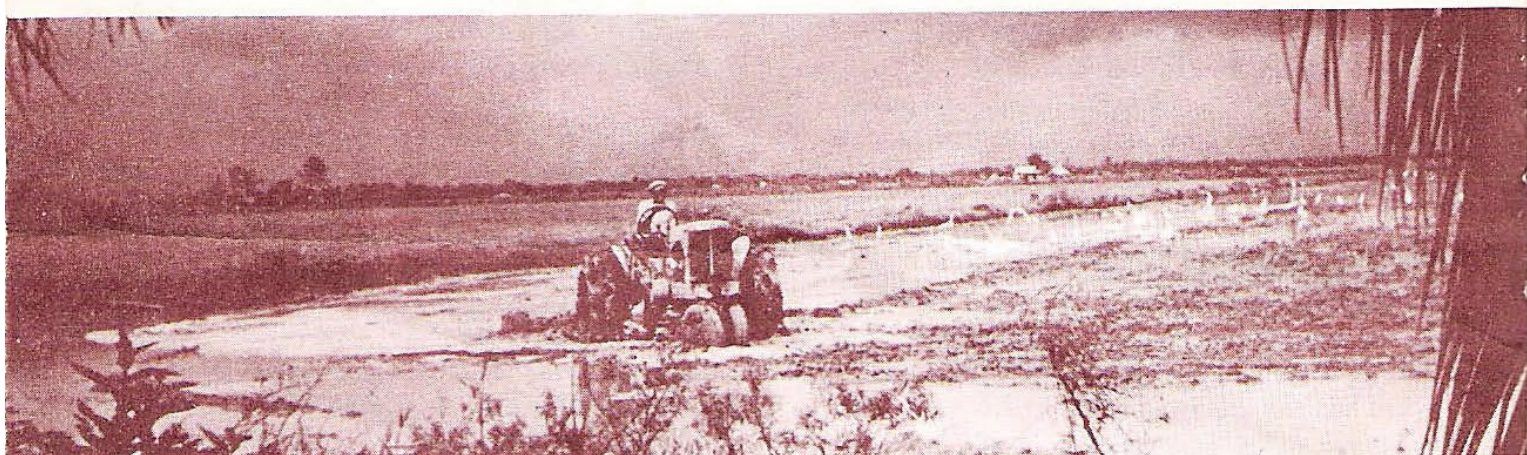


dred years the colony flourished, exporting sugar, coffee and cotton in large quantities.

During the Napoleonic wars, 1795-1815, British forces occupied Surinam. When the colony was returned to the Dutch, it was in a pitiful condition. For twenty years it had been cut off from the mother country; to restore it to its former prosperity required a good deal of capital. But the Dutch merchants were more interested in the fertile islands of Java and Sumatra in the East Indies than in Surinam. As a result Surinam led a languishing existence, without capital and adequate labor for development and depending for its normal life on subsidies from the government in The Netherlands.

River, about 100 miles from Paramaribo. It is well known that bauxite is one of the principal elements for the making of aluminum, and during the Second World War, Surinam provided about sixty per cent of American needs.

The centers of the bauxite mining activities are Moengo and Paranam, where the Surinam Bauxite Company, a subsidiary of the Aluminum Company of America, has its main plants. Moengo lies only 20 miles from the coast, although the river boats taking the product to Paramaribo must travel 100 miles along the river. The Billiton Company has its bauxite plants at Onverdacht, near Paranam. There is not much other traffic on the river, which is bordered by impenetrable jungles of mangroves, in-



**Surinam: Modern Machinery in Ricefield**

When, at the time of the Civil War in the United States most countries set their slaves free, Surinam followed the example. This made the labor problem even worse, so that the government had to attract labor from India and Java. Between 1873 and 1916, some 34,000 workers came from India and some 32,000 from Java. When their labor contracts came to an end, most of these workers refused to return home; they settled in Surinam and were given a piece of land and an amount in cash.

**Discovery of Bauxite.** The first promise of better economic conditions came about forty years ago with the discovery of bauxite on the Cottica

terspersed by a few villages of Bush Negroes and Indians.

Moengo is a strange mixture of the old and the new, of modern inventiveness and primitive living. The factory produces electricity for the whole town, which has a refrigerating plant, telephone and wireless service. There is also a moving picture theatre. There are modern houses for the American and European staff, a neat little Javanese village for the Indonesian workers and the village for the Negro workers. But no farther than a stone's throw from the town one can find the primitive life of the jungle that has continued undisturbed since ancient times.



**Planning The Future.** But by its nature, Surinam is really an agricultural country. With the disappearance of sugar, coffee and cotton crops due to lack of manpower, economists and agricultural experts are now concentrating to make the country self-sufficient in its food supply. First thoughts naturally turned to rice which has always been the staple food of the Javanese and British Indians who make up the larger part of the population and who have generations of experience in rice growing behind them. Rice appears to be well adopted to the Surinam soil, and its large-scale crop development promises well for the future.

A development plan for Surinam, costing 40 million guilders and which is financed by the Netherlands government, includes the drainage and diking of marshy areas, participating in various agricultural enterprises, promotion of agricultural education and training, the building of new roads, hospitals, etc. and promotion of new industries.

Very important is the new Land Reclamation project in the Nickerie district, also financed to a great extent by the Netherlands Government. Various projects are also under way for the expansion of coconut, citrus fruit and rubber growing. The lumber industry has benefited during the

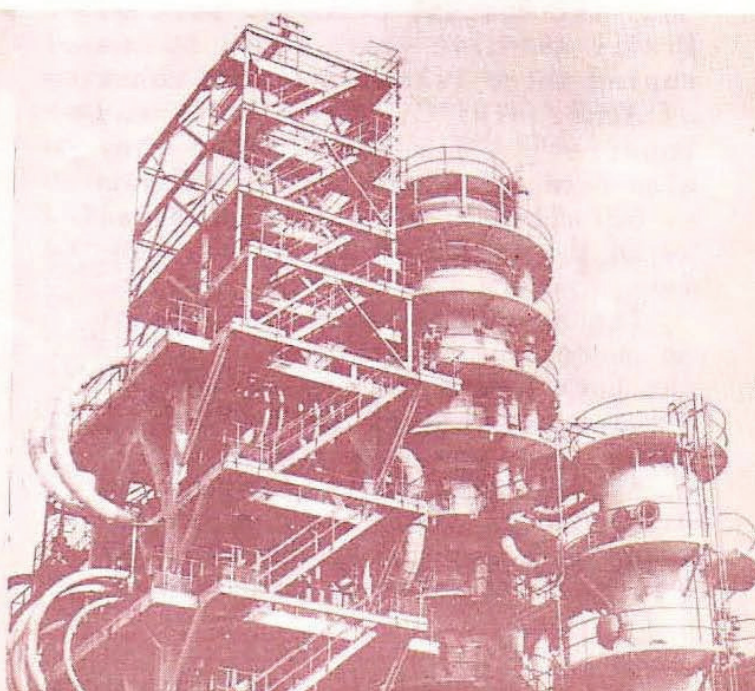
war years through the building at Paramaribo of sawmills by one of Holland's largest lumber firms. Large-scale exploitation of Surinam's dense forests may be expected to result in the coming years.

A survey of Surinam would not be complete without an acknowledgment of the contributions made to its history and development by the Portuguese Jews who since the earliest days of colonization have been eminent in practically every field of endeavor. As early as 1632, a small group of Jews driven from Portugal arrived with the English settlers. Large-scale immigration took place in 1652, after the Dutch lost Brazil to Portugal. Groups of Portuguese Jews crossed the border into Surinam and were given a liberal charter by the English. Since then, the Jewish colony has remained closely linked to the development of the territory. Many names in commercial and financial circles have continued through the centuries and are distinguished for the services their past bearers have rendered to the community.

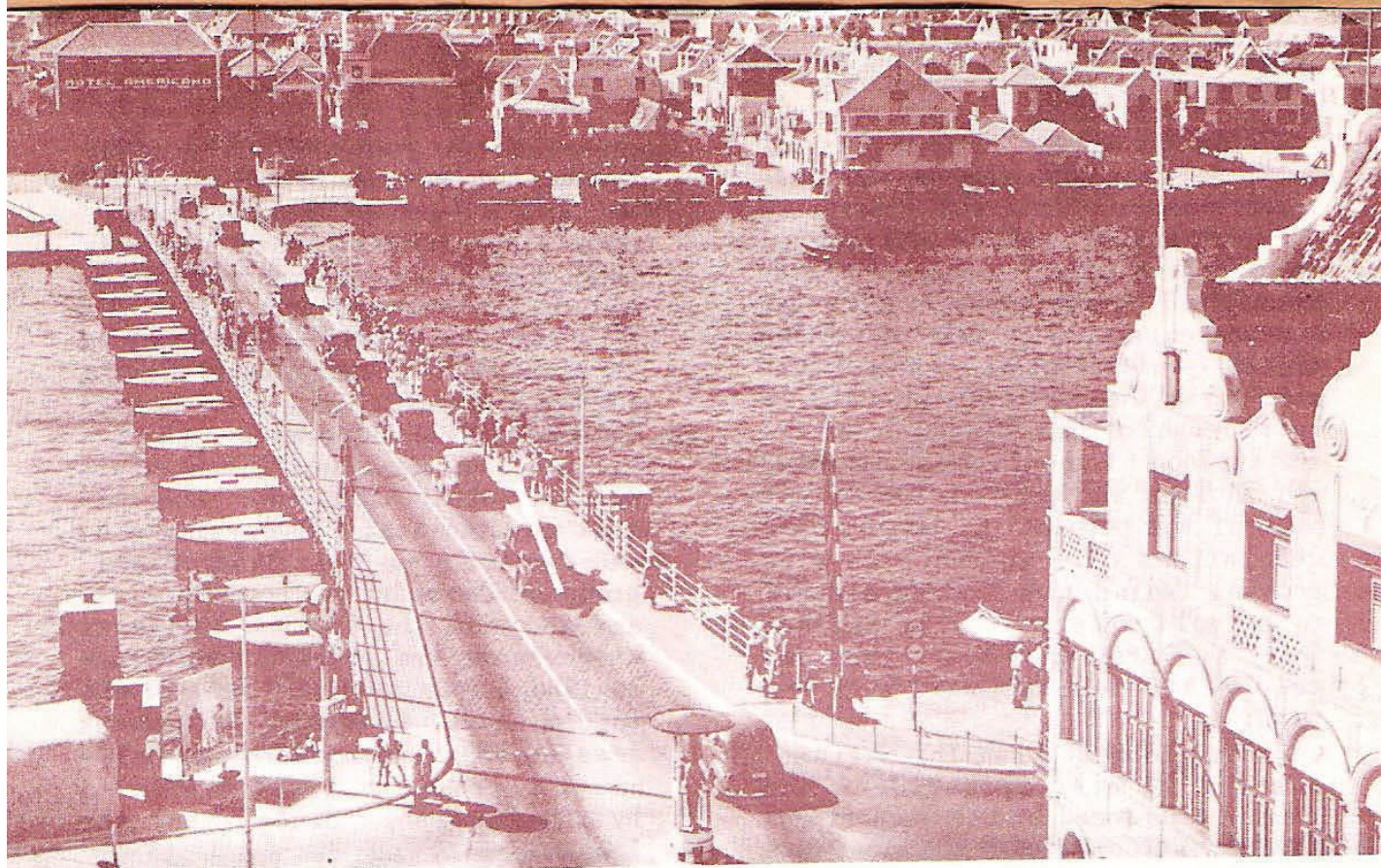
At present Surinam has its own autonomous administration and parliament. Together with Holland and the Netherlands Antilles it constitutes, on a basis of equal partnership, the Kingdom of The Netherlands.

### **The Sunny and the Dark Side of Life**

### **Oil Installation on Curacao**







Curacao: Willemstad, with Pontoon Bridge Across Harbor

## II. THE NETHERLANDS ANTILLES

Since 1586 Dutch merchant ships had been plying the Caribbean waters to bring in goods manufactured in Europe and slaves from Africa in return for hides, dyestuffs and salt, at that time the main products of the Caribbean islands. By 1621 competition among the many Dutch merchants was eliminated by the formation of the West Indies Company which started an ambitious colonization plan in the western hemisphere. In 1629 the Company occupied part of Brazil and five years later it occupied three islands off the coast of Venezuela: Curacao, Aruba and Bonaire. A few years later they also occupied three smaller islands -- 600 miles to the east of Curacao -- in the Lesser Antilles: St. Eustace, Saba and part of St. Martin.

The West Indies Company was not as successful in its efforts as was the East Indies Company in Java and Sumatra (in what is now Indonesia). After many ups and downs, mostly downs, the West Indies Company was dissolved in 1791, and the six islands came under the administration of the Netherlands government.

Through their conquest of Curacao the Dutch had gained possession of an island with several excellent harbors. Situated close to the coast of the South-American continent, on the trade routes between North and South America, it became a port for transshipment of sugar, indigo, tobacco and cocoa cargoes. During the Napoleonic wars the islands were occupied by the English and when they were returned to the Dutch after 20 years, plantations had been ruined and commerce had been destroyed. For many tens of years the future looked black for Curacao and the other islands.

Black Oil Makes Future Bright. But good fortune came again to them when oil was discovered in Venezuela, on the South-American continent and only 38 miles from Curacao. When the first well was drilled in 1914, it appeared that there were no suitable harbor facilities along the coast and a harbor for oil tankers had to be built somewhere else. Curacao, with its good climate and



with a harbor capable of holding an entire tanker fleet, lay close at hand. And so, a refinery was built on Curacao which started operations in 1918. Other oil companies entered the Venezuelan oilfields and additional refineries were built on Curacao's neighbor island of Aruba. Now, this latest refinery is the most completely electrically operated oil plant in the world. It is owned almost entirely by the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey and its technical personnel is practically wholly American.

Besides its oil refineries, Curacao has also an extensive phosphate mining industry. As a result, Curacao's population has more than doubled in the last 30 years, while that of Aruba has grown more than three times larger. Willemstad, capital of Curacao, is a large and busy city. As the Lake Maracaibo oil fields in Venezuela have tremendous reserves, it looks as though both Curacao and Aruba may look forward to many decades of prosperity.

Picturesque Willemstad. Around the harbor of Curacao's principal city, Willemstad, is centered the economic and social life of the population. As one American writer describes it, entering St. Anna Bay on a large steamer is like riding up New York City's Fifth Avenue on top of a double-deck bus and looking directly into the windows of stores and office buildings and down on streets crowded with pedestrians and automobiles.

To make it even more picturesque, although not more convenient, there is a pontoon bridge that connects the two sections of Willemstad at both sides of the channel. The bridge provides fast cross-channel traffic -- provided the bridge is not open to allow long strings of oil tankers to enter or leave the harbor behind the city.

In former days one had to pay toll to cross the bridge-- two cents if one wore shoes, one cent if one wore sandals, and nothing if one went barefoot. It was great fun for American and other foreign tourists to take off their shoes and walk

across the bridge on bare feet. A new pontoon bridge has been built since then; it is operated by the government -- free.

Truly a Melting Pot. The population of the Caribbean has been cosmopolitan since the romantic days of the Spanish Main. Thanks to the liberal policy of the Dutch, who from the beginning allowed freedom of religion and enterprise, Curacao emulates -- on a smaller and somewhat different scale -- the melting pot that is New York City. Of the original Carib people there are but few traces left, but Curacao has been successively in the hands of the Spanish, the English and the Dutch. Negro slaves were brought from Africa, Portuguese Jews came from Brazil, Chinese and Syrians and people from the Azores and Madeira joined the polyglot community. All in all, some forty-five races are said to be represented on little Curacao. The native language, Papiamentu, contains Indian, African, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and French words. Spanish, naturally, predominates.

Aruba, the smallest of the A B C Group, is a study in physical contrasts. There is, first of all, the oil town of St. Nicolaas, a conglomeration of tanks and piers and machine shops and differing from an American oil town only in that the workers come mostly from the indigenous population and from the neighboring Caribbean Islands. Nevertheless, the town is becoming more and more Americanized because of the many hundreds of Americans who make up the technical staff of the industry. Oranjestad, the island's capital, is a mixture of the new and the old.

Tropical Paradise. Different again is the island's west coast with its beautiful beaches of fine white sand, fringed by coconut palms. There are gleaming white dunes and black overhanging cliffs that offer the setting of a picture book South Sea island. Aruba's peculiar charm makes it unusually attractive for tourists.

The third island of the group,



Bonaire, still is far removed from the atomic age. Its salt ponds are still worked in the same primitive way as they were several hundred years ago. There are dirt roads and small villages. The population is almost entirely rural and live on their farms which they surround with cactus hedges and seldom leave, except to go to church on Sunday. Automobiles are a rarity on the island. The Bonairians are mostly of Indian descent.

Like three dots in the Caribbean, six hundred miles to the east of Curacao, yet forming a political part of the Curacao Territory, stand the three little islands, perhaps the smallest of the Lesser Antilles. Together, they measure thirty square miles. St. Martin, the largest, is part Dutch and part French. Its only harbor lies in the French area. Saba, the smallest, is less than half the

size of Manhattan. St. Eustace is all of twelve square miles.

Even as in Surinam, the Portuguese Jews have made large contributions to the developments of Curacao, where they have been established since 1652 under a liberal charter from the Netherlands government. In fact, this was the first charter of its sort in the western hemisphere. In 1656, the Jewish congregation in Curacao built its first synagogue. By 1750, the Jewish community counted some 2,000 members, representing all trades and professions: from the inscriptions on the oldest tombstones it appears that many of those early Jewish settlers were sea captains.

Even as Surinam, the Netherlands Antilles has its own autonomous administration. Together with Holland and Surinam it constitutes, on a basis of equal partnership, the Kingdom of The Netherlands.

**Street in Paramaribo, Capital of Surinam**





# S T A T I S T I C A L   I N F O R M A T I O N

## POPULATION January 1, 1951

<u>Surinam</u>		<u>Netherlands Antilles</u>	
Creoles	82,048	Curacao	102,000
Indonesians	38,165	Aruba	53,574
Hindustanis	66,829	Bonaire	5,011
Chinese	2,849	St. Martin	1,513
Negro Bushmen	22,000	St. Eustace	955
Indians	3,700	Saba	1,110
Others	5,390		
	<u>220,981</u>		<u>164,163</u>

## IMPORTS AND EXPORTS, SURINAM

(In Surinam Guilders)\*

	<u>Imports</u>	<u>Exports</u>
1944	15,645,344	6,990,780
1945	12,626,652	7,432,264
1946	15,710,868	11,513,612
1947	30,982,018	24,581,839
1948	36,172,232	27,382,685
1949	37,812,004	34,077,650
1950	39,319,567	31,483,151
1951	45,833,093	39,708,758

## Exports to the United States in 1951

	<u>Guilders</u>
Bauxite	29,784,488
Balata rubber	303,563
Lumber and Plywood	156,829
Miscellaneous	<u>11,073</u>
	30,255,953

	<u>Guilders</u>
Exports to The Netherlands (1951)	1,023,711
Imports from The Netherlands (1951)	13,041,485
Imports from the United States (1951)	17,448,247

## IMPORTS AND EXPORTS, 1950, NETHERLANDS ANTILLES

(In Curacao Guilders)\*

	<u>Curacao</u>	<u>Aruba</u>
Oil Imports	382,352,000	582,523,000
Oil Exports	414,060,000	608,777,000

\* The Surinam and Curacao Guilder equals \$.53



## Exports of Phosphates

	<u>Tons</u>	<u>Guilders</u>
1946	73,594	386,918
1947	79,229	591,809
1948	58,827	453,473
1949	93,013	751,000
1950	93,025	744,000

## Other Imports 1950

	<u>Curacao</u>	<u>Aruba</u>
Machinery, etc.	11,420,000	4,233,000
Textiles	14,889,000	7,252,000
Consumer Goods	26,696,000	16,834,000
Miscellaneous	56,778,000	30,415,000
	109,783,000	58,734,000

## Other Exports 1950

	<u>Curacao</u>	<u>Aruba</u>
Machinery, etc.	603,000	355,000
Textiles	612,000	806,000
Consumer Goods	2,228,000	2,091,000
Miscellaneous	9,072,000	3,505,000
	12,515,000	6,757,000

## S H I P P I N G

### Surinam (port of Paramaribo)

1946	381 Ships
1947	664 Ships
1948	735 Ships
1949	694 Ships
1951	701 Ships

## Netherlands Antilles

### Curacao

	<u>No. of Ships</u>	<u>Tons</u>
1946	996	12,691,819
1947	1,588	24,913,332
1948	1,994	32,036,158
1949	1,812	29,089,000
1950	1,915	29,137,000

### Aruba

	<u>No. of Ships</u>	<u>Tons</u>
1946	246	863,114
1947	275	1,405,096
1948	308	1,815,875
1949	457	3,159,000
1950	492	4,739,000

### Oil Tankers

#### Curacao

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Tons</u>
1946	4,894	63,027,619
1947	5,603	63,430,799
1948	6,536	83,358,448
1949	5,449	72,647,000
1950	5,250	71,747,000

#### Aruba

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Tons</u>
1946	6,145	83,716,493
1947	6,933	95,841,144
1948	7,122	94,097,805
1949	5,710	82,341,000
1950	5,319	87,300,000

In 1950, 1,858 sailing ships (142,000 tons) entered the port of Curacao and 966 sailing ships (112,000 tons) the port of Aruba.

